



Review of Garage Lock-up and Garage Sites

Report by Kevin Anderson, Executive Director - Place

Report for Information

1 Recommendations

It is recommended that Council notes this report for information and comment.

2 Purpose of Report

At the meeting of Midlothian Council on 14th December 2021, a report was requested to provide up to date information on garage lock-ups and garage sites owned by Midlothian Council and to advise on future proposals to undertake a review to identify potential opportunities to re-purpose those sites where there is currently low demand and occupancy rates.

Date: 10th March 2022

Report Contact:

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3 Background

3.1 Garage Lock-ups

The Council currently owns 675 lock-up garages across Midlothian, usually located within council housing estates. These are let and managed by the Housing Services Team. The numbers of lock-up garages in use at any one time changes from week to week. At the date of this report, there are currently 223 void lock-up garages spread across Midlothian, which constitutes 33% of the overall garage stock. There are currently no applications for lock-up garages.

Lock-up garages are let using a standard lease to tenants for a standard monthly rent, which is reviewed along with council house rents on an annual basis. The current weekly charge is £13.84 for council house tenants and £16.60 for non-tenants, as this includes a VAT charge. The Council is responsible for maintaining the lock-up garage fabric and the sites, including the access roads. It is likely that the cost of lock-up garages has become a disincentive to tenants or residents in the area renting these units. A Council tenant would currently pay £719.68 per year. Non-council tenants can also rent a garage lock-up but they incur a further 20% charge for VAT. The garage lock-up rent charge was previously reviewed in line with market value and benchmarked against other local authorities. At the Council Meeting held on February 2020, Councillors agreed to a consultation on a proposed reduction of lock-up garage rents which will be incorporated into the rent strategy consultation due later this year.

3.2 Garage Sites

The Council currently owns 334 garage sites across Midlothian where a plot is rented for the erection of a garage by the individual tenant. The numbers of garage sites in use at any one time changes from week to week. At the date of this report, there are currently 70 void garage sites spread across Midlothian, which constitutes 21% of the overall garage sites. There are currently no applications for garage sites.

Garage site tenants are responsible for the maintenance of their own garage while the Council maintains the site and its access. The annual rent charged is £52.00.

3.3 Council owned lock-up garages and sites located across Midlothian vary from standalone blocks of garages in large plots, to small isolated buildings on small sections of land. The variety of garage buildings presents a number of challenges and opportunities to the Council in terms of repair, maintenance and management to possible re-purposing for alternative uses to benefit Midlothian's communities. The garage lock-ups have been subject to very limited investment in recent years meaning the overall portfolio requires a significant level of investment to maintain and improve the assets in the coming years to ensure these remain safe and usable assets for the residents of Midlothian. There is currently no planned maintenance programme for

garage sites and lock-up sites. This will require that the stock is surveyed to determine future investment needs.

- 3.4** Low demand garage sites have a negative impact on the local environment and are a drain on Council resources. Midlothian Council does consider the demand for garage lock-ups and sites and where it has been possible has previously re-used land to build new housing as part of the Council's affordable housing programme as at Crichton Avenue, Pathhead and Castlelaw Terrace , Bilston providing additional 20 affordable homes. It is also proposed to include garage lock-ups at Stone Place, Mayfield and Oak Place, Mayfield into the Council's affordable housing programme due to lack of demand, vandalism and public safety concerns at those locations.
- 3.5** Further activities aimed at engaging with Midlothian's communities regarding future garage lock-ups and garage site developments and redevelopment will identify and consider specific improvement projects to replace redundant and under-used garage areas. Potential opportunities in regards to the future approach is set out in more detail below.

4 Potential Future Alternative Use for Garage Lock-ups and Garage Sites

- 4.1** It is proposed that a dedicated staff resource, linking with relevant Council services, local communities and ward Councillors, will be deployed to revise work previously undertaken some time ago by the Housing and Construction Teams to review and identify potential opportunities to re-purpose those garage lock-up and sites where there is currently low demand and occupancy rates. A recent review of the garage sites and lock-up data has identified a number of sites where it is considered re-use or demolition is the most appropriate course of action. This has been determined based on the locality of the sites, current condition of the garage assets, repeated issues with anti-social behaviour, fly tipping and management of the lock-ups and sites.
- 4.2** Potential alternative uses for garage lock-ups and sites may include:
- sites assessed for development potential are included in the Council's future affordable housing programme. While some existing lock-up sites have emerged as priorities as highlighted above, a more thorough analysis of garage lock-ups and sites is required to develop a list of potential sites
 - providing an enhanced and attractive neighbourhood environment with access to quality outdoor green, public and play spaces providing opportunities for increased socialisation in housing developments, building positive relationships in the community and providing opportunities to be physically active contributing to improved health and wellbeing outcomes
 - contributing to economic development and increasing the capacity of local communities to improve economic activity,

growth and quality of life outcomes as aligned to the Community Planning Partnership's Single Midlothian Plan vision of a 'great place to grow'. This may include workshops for rent or providing fixed desk, private office, meeting and event space for local businesses

- community recycling facilities such as the reuse cabin previously located and piloted at Stobhill recycling centre, making a positive contribution to Midlothian Council's Climate Change Strategy
- easing parking pressures by creating additional car parking spaces where there is demand for this
- land sale to generate income
- disposal of land to other council services where this is aligned to strategic and operational objectives
- other priorities identified by local communities and ward Councillors.

4.3 A subsequent, further report outlining recommended proposals and targeted initiatives can then be provided to Council.

5 Report Implications (Resource, Digital and Risk)

5.1 Resource

It is proposed to deploy a dedicated staff member from existing staffing resources with no impact on staffing budget.

Any longer-term resource implications will be identified in the subsequent report submitted to Council.

5.2 Digital

None identified.

5.3 Risk

Potential negative consequences of not progressing this review may have for Midlothian's communities is poor quality and unsightly environment.

5.4 Ensuring Equalities (if required a separate IIA must be completed)

Whilst there are no direct implications at present arising from this report Community Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out in future against proposals where required.

5.5 Additional Report Implications

Not applicable.

A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Examples are provided in section 4.2 of the report.

A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- Holistic Working
- Hub and Spoke
- Modern
- Sustainable
- Transformational
- Preventative
- Asset-based
- Continuous Improvement
- One size fits one
- None of the above

A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- One Council Working with you, for you
- Preventative and Sustainable
- Efficient and Modern
- Innovative and Ambitious
- None of the above

A.4 Delivering Best Value

We manage all aspects of our business so that tenants and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.

A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

This report provides an overview of the current position and planned actions. No consultation was required or undertaken at this time. However, the lead Council Officer will consult closely with local communities, ward Councillors and other Council services as set out in section 4.1 of the report.

A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The report sets out proposals to undertake a review to identify potential opportunities to re-purpose garage sites where there is currently low demand and occupancy rates to deliver positive outcomes as detailed in section 4.2 of the report.

A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The focus of future proposals presented to Councillors and local communities will aim to improve both the provision and quality of community assets.

A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Good practice to be adopted in relation to energy efficiency and sustainability will be contained in the future report outlining recommended proposals for re-use of garage lock-ups and sites.